

July 17, 2009 - No Pork Here

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Over the years, U.S. Rep John P. Murtha, D-Johnstown, has taken a lot of flack on the national scene for various pork-barrel projects. His critics claim that the taxpayers money is doled out for frivolous projects benefiting mostly Murtha in the form of campaign contributions from those lucky enough to secure contracts for the work.

However, we've seen nothing like that around here. Consider, for example, his effort to secure a contract for a local company to make armored Humvees lighter and safer for U.S. troops.

Shumar Industries in Brier Hill is producing a Humvee rollover simulator used to train troops to get out of the vehicles safely after they have rolled. Shumar is also developing armored gun turrets for Humvees, working on ways to decrease the weight while improving safety.

Such a vital project sure doesn't look like pork to us. Ensuring soldiers safety is a valuable and important, especially in Humvees which can be deadly when rolled. In fact, next to improvised explosive devices (IEDs), military officials have called Humvee rollovers the second most deadly thing that can happen to soldiers in the field.

Jeff Yates, program manager at Shumar, said the rollover simulator teaches gunners how to safely disconnect from their harnesses and get out of the gun turret before they are crushed if their Humvee is flipped over. Shumar is the only maker of the simulator that includes a gun turret.

"It's actually saved lives already," Yates said.

Shumar is currently producing the specialty training equipment for various branches of the military through Defense Department contracts that Murtha helped the company to obtain. Approximately 7,000 military personnel are trained each month in the Shumar units.

"This is real important," Murtha said. "I see these guys in the hospital. The biggest injuries come when these things turn over, catch fire and the men have a hard time getting out."

This type of defense contract is effective and has a quantifiable benefit on soldiers' safety. It also helps to bring jobs to the area, making it a win-win situation for the country and the county.

Eli Shumar, president of the company, said the firm has 99 employees working on defense contracts and the company's original product, mining equipment. Two years ago the company had about 69 employees. With additional contracts, Shumar estimates the company could add another 25 to 50 jobs.

What we've seen in Fayette County - from Shumar Industries in Brier Hill to BAE Systems in Lemont Furnace - are projects that benefit the military and also help our economy. Murtha's critics may find it easy to lump all of his efforts under the umbrella of frivolous pork barrel spending, but maybe they should come to Fayette County and see firsthand how these projects are working here.

We know that to some, bringing home jobs is somehow below the dignity of a congressman, but here where every job matters and can often mean the difference between a life on welfare or in the workplace, we're more than happy to have John Murtha standing up for us in the U.S. House of Representatives.

While others may find fault with his methods, we can only praise him for all he's done for Fayette County. And perhaps if some of those critics lived here, they'd feel the same way.